



Mother Without a Mask: A Westerner's story of her Arab family

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'Mother Without a Mask' provides a fascinating and very human insight into the lives of Middle Eastern women who are so often out of sight, particularly from Western eyes.

Mother Without a Mask: A Westerner's story of her Arab family Details

Date : Published October 1st 2004 by Kyle Books (first published 1991)

ISBN : 9781856265492

Author : Patricia Holton

Format : Paperback 278 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Biography, Travel, History, Religion, Islam, Autobiography, Memoir



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From Reader Review Mother Without a Mask: A Westerner's story of her Arab family for online ebook

Dalton Adams says

This book does not give a true portrait of this country. It is the viewpoint of someone who never left the gilded halls of the royals. That is not reality. Plus, it's boring. I can only read about women sitting in tents, drinking coffee and gossiping so much.

Salma says

I thought its another story i was looking for. The one for the lady who sh. Zayed build Al Wahha Hospital in honer of her. Anyways..

Some chapters are redundant , but Hey, its detailed lifestyle about Badu (Native ppl of Middle East), somethings are expected to be routine.

I'm going to gift this book to somebody who i find interested in UAE culture and past as it says much, in modest and majestic way. I don't know who is he yet, but i will keep my doors open.

Heather says

Another one I couldn't finish. I read 100+ pages, but could go no further. This book had such potential, but I found the author's tone to be privileged and condescending, and her encounters with the arab family too monotonous. There was such depth of observation that could have been tapped, but it read like a list of what was worn, what was eaten, what was said, with very little personal growth or insight alluded to.

Ruth says

Patricia Holton has a great love for her Arabic friends and that love showed clearly in her writing. I have trouble with her apparent acceptance of her Arabic friend's marriage and family life practices. It seemed she was trying to persuade the reader that these things are cultural and should be accepted as right or correct, at least from their cultural point of view. Early in the book was a chapter titled "A Jack-of-all-Trades and a Slave". I quote something that Holton wrote about slaves: "Limitations of education, travel and money breed a slave mentality even if in law there is freedom. If a man or woman were traded as a slave, then told, some twenty years later, that they were free, where were they to go and how were they to manage? Most would have married and settled within the broad life of the family that owned them. They were psychologically bound even though the extraordinary growth of the area might have made them economically free." In this book, Holton told of the daily life of women. Women who were sheltered within the family, specifically women sheltered by women. Schooling was not encouraged for a women and women married early, putting an end to the question of higher education. Marriage and motherhood were the only option for women. Being a wife and mother is the greatest and best and most noble occupation a women can have, if it is a choice. A choice made with a full knowledge of what the options are. Without knowledge and the freedom to choose,

marriage and motherhood are, at best, domestic slavery. I think the world should continue to move away from the idea of keeping women dumb so they will slave away for the men. Serving by choice out of love is wonderful. Slavery is wrong. I'm sorry to say the Holton's book did nothing to help me feel good about a culture that keeps women hidden behind veil and mask.

DubaiReader says

A window in time.

I originally read this in 2001 and gave it just two stars. I found it boring, and only the details of the wedding really interested me. I recently re-read it, reluctantly, for a book group, and I was surprised to discover a fascinating account of a bye-gone era.

Patricia Holton's husband had business with the United Arab Emirates in the 1970s. As a result of this, Patricia agrees to host the two younger sons of an Emirati Sheikh, while they do their university courses in the UK. She helps them to acclimatise to life in England and is curious about the country they have left. Over many breakfasts and suppers, they teach each other and compare cultural differences.

Eventually Patricia, now known as Mrs Tea Cup by the boys, is invited to Al Ain, an oasis area of Abu Dhabi, as guest to the family. She begins her visits in a hotel, but as they all get to know each other better, she is invited to their homes, and finally absorbed into the family, particularly by the women.

The book provides a wonderful cultural window into a time that is now largely passed. These women were the last of a generation that has since been swamped by oil wealth and tourism. Ms Holton is sad to see this era pass, but rather repetitive with her comments to this effect. However, her observations of family life do provide a rare insight into the traditions of the modern day Emiratis.

I originally came to the Emirates in 1984 and I remember the old Buraimi part of Al Ain; now fenced off from the Emirates as it is actually part of Oman. Old houses can still be found from this time and it is fascinating to imagine how the much simpler life of these people went on in those, now crumbling, houses.

Apart from the frequent comments bemoaning the end of an era, my other criticism would be a feeling that this is a slightly sanitised version. I sense that the author is being very respectful to her hosts and only writing what they wish her to.

Strangely, while many of the women are named, I can't think of a time when the two boys or their father, are actually called by their names, they are always known as The Second Son, The Youngest Son and The Sheikh.

This is well worth reading if you are living in the UAE and has also been enjoyed by several of our visitors to the area.

Jen says

I recommend this book for anyone interested in traditional life in the UAE. It's especially poignant given the changes that have occurred over the last three decades which Patricia Holton very accurately points out. So

much of the culture I see living in the UAE today is better understood after having read this book.

BirnitaB says

I read this a few years ago but particularly enjoyed it as I was lucky enough to spend a few years in the Gulf myself & feel it gives "a peep behind the veil" of old Arabia which I loved. The true story is the account of an English woman who becomes the host mother to an Arabic boy studying in the UK. She is hosted back by him and gets to meet his family & experience their way of life in a way few expats do.

I had this book but lent it & never got it back, would like to get it another copy.

Debra says

I hoped this would be a good read because I live in Abu Dhabi and I thought it would be full of a Westerner's insight on the culture and customs. Nope. It was extremely boring and as a friend of the royal family whose book they endorsed she couldn't say anything even remotely negative so it didn't come across as sincere since everything was beautiful and wonderful. I don't believe it for a second.

Indira says

This is a book that you would definitely not miss reading if you happen to live in the UAE but not for its depth of insight or for its breadth of understanding. You would read it for the sheer scarcity of written materials on the Emirati culture that it is ostensibly about. Read it also for an all too brief glimpse into the magical world of Arabian folklore. Or for a time travel into the rituals of a pretty elaborate local wedding which have purportedly all but disappeared in current times.

Why did we not find much to talk about then in the book club meet? First of all, the author would have done very well to use a ghost writer. Yes, she just can't write. Sentences so obviously labored such as these give you an idea of how hilarious the writing can be. (Someone did a brilliant reading of this which brought tears into all of our eyes!)

Secondly, be it contractual or operational, clearly there were constraints. Which mention that the author could neither speak nor show anything other than unrestrained adulation and admiration. Even when her hosts dismiss journey to the moon as a hoax.

Thirdly, she has neither the patience nor the curiosity to observe and analyze dispassionately.

The book fails to evoke any strong feelings of either like or dislike, the lack of which will restrain any enriching discussion. For me personally, it was a mildly entertaining if repetitive fast read.

Melissa Cavanaugh says

This was so interesting! An American woman living in Britain fostered two Emirati boys, sons of a sheikh, while they were in school, and as a result ended up spending a great deal of time with their family in Al Ain and Abu Dhabi. While there have been a number of books from and about men during this time of great change, there's been little about how it has affected Emirati women. This was something of a romantic portrait of their lives, but in a good way.

Nicole says

I would strongly recommend this book to any expat from the west planning to live in the UAE, especially Al Ain. The author bases the book on a strong relationship she maintained with a local (influential) family. So much rapid development and cultural mutation has happened in the last 40 years in the UAE. We have been curious about so many minute details of this culture, and what it was like (especially for women and families) before the extreme modernization. Patricia Holton's account of over a decade of visits, questions, and observation answered so many of my curiosities. While not a thorough history of the country or emirate, this book does provide many detailed explanations of what goes on in family compounds, dispelled myths, and unlocked the door to a part of this culture that is difficult to access, if it still remains.

Ayesha Al Fardan says

This book Isn't really new information to me cause I am from the United Arab Emirates. The book was basically a trip down memory lane even though I am not apart of the same generation. However, my grandparents and parents always told me of the stories during that time so it wasn't any new to me. I loved how the writer described everything so vividly that I felt I was apart of them. Lastly, my country wouldn't be where it is now without the great ruler Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan may his soul rest in peace. He turned a desert into one of the top countries in the world. He was our father, our teacher, and our leader all at the same time. I highly recommend this book to whoever is curious to know more about the Emirati tradition.

Ruth Frisby says

Quite enjoyed this - an insight into an arab way of life.

Pattie says

A real insight into the Emirates culture especially through a women's perspective. Not so much a story with a plot as it is a peak into their lives and the culture here in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain.

Cat says

Living in the UAE this book was very relevant and appealing. The insights into Arab culture and family are valuable, and I appreciated a deeper understanding of the generosity behind the flashy and aggressive façade of the younger Emirati men (this is what you see in reality).
